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NEWS RELEASE

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SUCCESS OF VIOLENT CRIME IMPACT TEAM IS JUST ONE PART OF MESSAGE FROM LAW ENFORCEMENT TO CRIMINALS WITH GUNS

*VCIT arrests followed by aggressive media campaign designed to deter illegal gun possession.
Campaign includes TV, radio, billboards, bus signs and milk cartons.*

FRESNO – United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) Special Agent in Charge Stephen K. Martin, Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer, and Fresno County District Attorney Elizabeth Egan today reported on the success of the Violent Crime Impact Team in Fresno at its one-year mark.

The Violent Crime Impact Team (VCIT) is a federal initiative aimed at identifying and arresting the most violent offenders in 15 selected cities across the United States. Teams of federal agents are paired with local law enforcement officers to target repeat offenders with tough prosecutions and tough sentences. The program, which focuses on offenses committed with firearms, is still ongoing in Fresno.

In June 2005, the VCIT team, comprised of the Fresno Police Department, ATF, and the United States Marshals Service, began its intensive investigation of criminals using, possessing and selling illegal firearms in the City of Fresno.

Chief Dyer stated, "The VCIT team has been an invaluable asset to the Fresno Police Department. Anytime you can combine the resources of the Fresno Police Department, the ATF, U.S. Marshals Service, the Fresno County D.A., and the Office of U.S. Attorney McGregor Scott, you are sending a message that crimes committed with guns will not be tolerated in Fresno." Chief Dyer notes, "Year to date, violent crime is down 5.3%, and total crime is down 4.8%." During this one-year period, the police department has made 238 gun-related arrests in Central, Southeast, and Southwest Fresno, the specific areas where the VCIT has focused its attention.

ATF Special Agent in Charge Stephen K. Martin announced that ATF Fresno field agents had seized 109 weapons in this one year. These include handguns, rifles, assault rifles and shotguns. ATF Special Agent in Charge Martin stated, "ATF will continue in our fight against violent crime. Taking guns away from armed violent offenders will have a lasting effect in your community."

The United States Attorney and the Fresno County District Attorney combined forces to determine the most effective venue in which to prosecute those arrested for possessing, using or trafficking in illegal weapons. When appropriate, the United States Attorney prosecuted violent gun

offenders in federal court where they can expect to receive higher sentences than they would if prosecuted in state court. At the one year mark, approximately 63 defendants have been prosecuted in federal court for federal firearms offenses in Fresno. Since that date, another 12 have been charged with federal violations. "As I promised a year ago, gang members and other violent offenders need to get the message that there will be hard time for gun crime," said United States Attorney Scott.

Fresno County District Attorney Elizabeth Egan stated that over the past year, her office had obtained convictions in over 400 cases in which the defendant possessed, used, or sold illegal firearms. District Attorney Egan said, "This joint effort led by the U.S. Attorney and ATF along with Fresno's local enforcement agencies is a meaningful approach in that law-abiding citizens should be free from the threat of gang members, parolees and their dangerous weapons. Our goal is to make our county and city streets safer and this collaborative approach is very productive when dealing with these armed and violent criminals."

Sending criminals to prison is not the only means by which federal law enforcement agencies are sending the message that illegal firearm possession and use will not be tolerated in our communities. United States Attorney Scott and the Past-President of the Board of Directors of Fresno Area Crime Stoppers, Bruce Batti, today unveiled a dramatic media campaign designed locally to get the word out. The campaign includes hard-hitting TV ads produced by KSEE 24; radio ads produced by Y-101 Radio; multilingual billboards and bus signs designed by Jeffrey/Scott Advertising; and messages on milk cartons designed by Jeffrey/Scott Advertising and generously donated by Producer's Dairy. The campaign also includes bumper stickers and ads placed on thousands of matchbook covers.

The Fresno Area Crime Stoppers is a joint partnership between the Fresno Police Department, the Fresno County Sheriff's Department, local media, and citizens designed to catch criminals throughout the Valley. Last year, 856 arrests were generated from over 2,000 tips to the Crime Stoppers hotline, 559-498-STOP, which offers rewards up to \$1,000 for information leading to an arrest or the solving of a crime.

In 2005, the U.S. Department of Justice, through its Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) program, awarded a grant of \$50,000 to the Fresno Crime Stoppers to carry out this campaign to deter criminals from possessing and using firearms. Unlike many federal grant programs in which grants are awarded from Washington, D.C., PSN grants are awarded by local task forces that are familiar with the pressing and immediate problems of their local communities.

United States Attorney Scott explained that all of these efforts are part of a multi-pronged, comprehensive plan to reduce violent gun crime in the Fresno area. In addition to the federal resources committed to the VCIT team and the Crime Stoppers campaign, over the last 2 years the Project Safe Neighborhoods program committed grants funds to the Fresno area to fund the salary of a deputy district attorney dedicated to prosecuting firearms offenses and to fund overtime for the Fresno Police Department to participate in VCIT and other violent crime reduction activities. In addition, the PSN program has funded a full-time criminalist position at the Fresno County Sheriff's laboratory to facilitate participation in ATF's NIBIN program, a computer-based system capable of matching ballistic evidence from different crime scenes to determine if the same gun was used.

As United States Attorney Scott explained, "We have tried to bring every resource to bear on this problem to make the streets of Fresno safer for its citizens."

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